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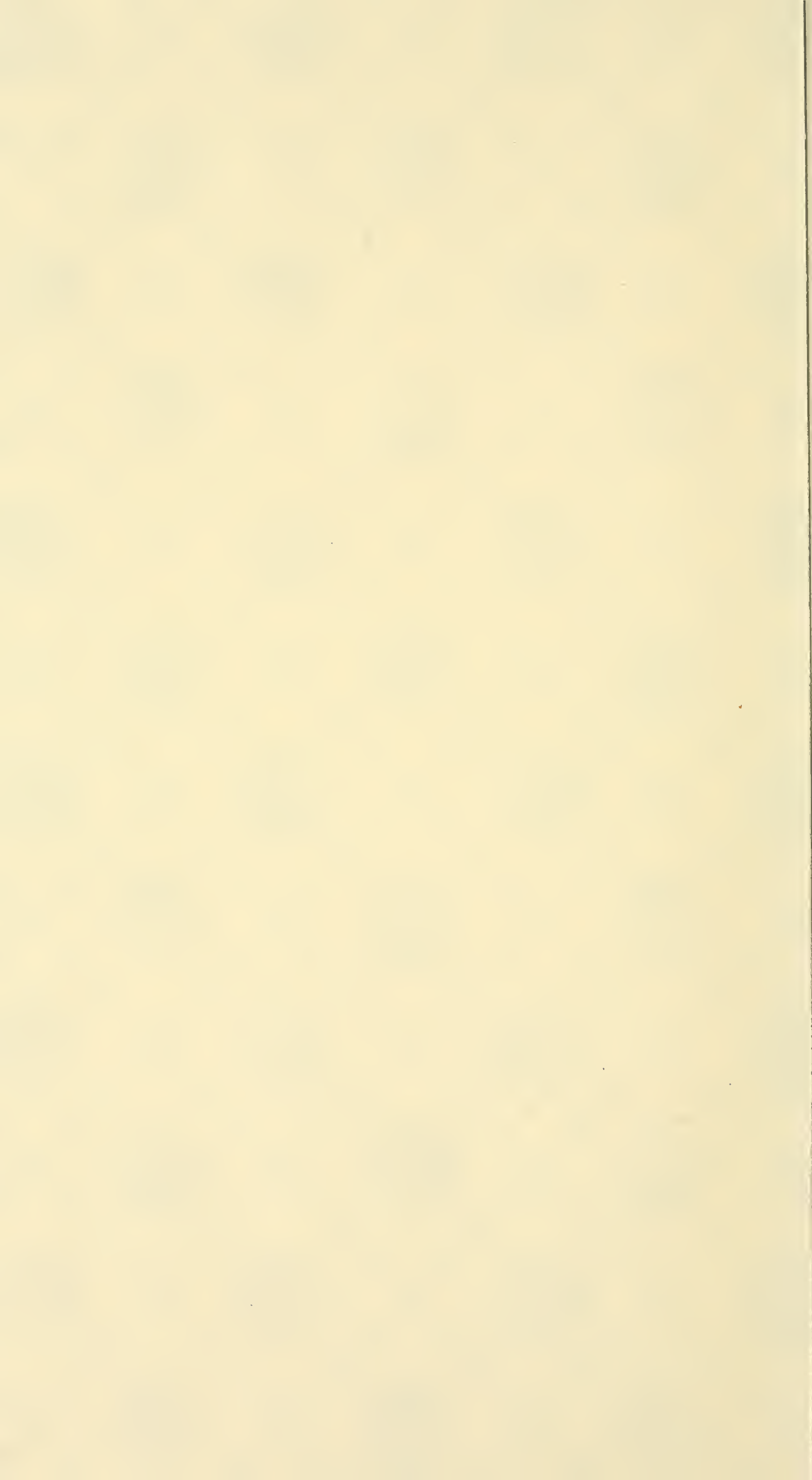
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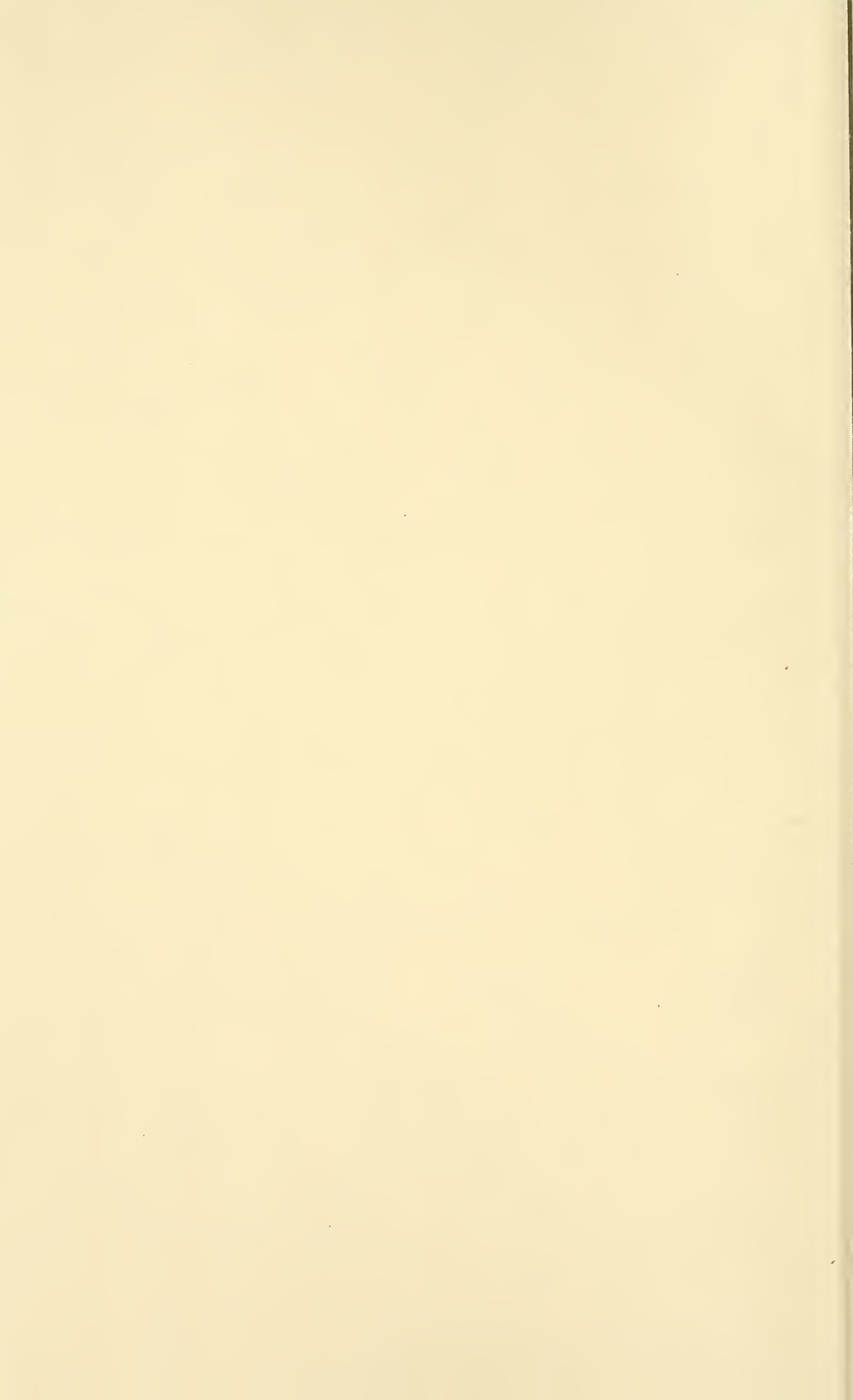












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# The Building of the Nation

BY

NICHOLAS MURRAY BUTLER

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## THE BUILDING OF THE NATION

MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS:—For the honor of the invitation to be your guest I am deeply sensible, and for that honor I wish first to express my grateful appreciation. It is no small compliment to be permitted to speak at a time like this to a great company of men, drawn from all parts of our nation, representing every shade of opinion, who are single-minded in their devotion to truth and to its interpretation as they see and understand it, and in their devotion to our common America.

In this presence of men of affairs, so closely in touch with the movement of opinion all over the world, accustomed to guide, to express, to formulate it, there is nothing that I can possibly say that you do not already know. But I remember that it is out of the reflections of individuals, and out of their reaction to the changing course of events that first public opinion and then history is made.

If any significance be attached to what I shall briefly say in your presence, it can only be because it represents the attempt of one American who feels keenly the responsibility of his country and of its entire citizenship at this moment when the world stands at a crossroads in its path of progress. If we stand at that crossroads irresolute, paralyzed of word and will, history will have one story to tell.

If we turn to the right and take the path that leads upward to new achievement and to lasting honor, it will have a very different story to tell. If we should turn to the left and follow the winding and rocky road that leads down to a darkening gloom—we know not where—history will have yet another record to make of the American people and of their capacity to represent civilization.

### Leaders of Civilization

It is just about twenty years ago since George Meredith, writing to *The London Daily News*, said that since the benignant outcome of the greatest of civil wars he had come to look upon the American people as the leaders in civilization. That is a proud and ennobling judgment, and we may well search our minds and our hearts to ascertain whether it be true, and whether we are competent for the high honor that so distinguished an observer of his kind proffered to us as his personal judgment.

The question which I ask in your presence this afternoon is this: Have we an American nation? If so, is that nation conscious of a unity of purpose and of ideals? If so, what is to be the policy of that nation in the immediate future?

It must not be forgotten that nations are comparatively new in human history. There were no nations in the ancient world. Men were grouped in empires, in races, as followers of a religion, as clansmen owing allegiance to a chief, but not in nations as we use the



word. There were no nations until the dream of a universal political empire had passed away, until the stately magnificence of Rome had broken into a hundred fragments. It was then and only then that a new organizing force made itself felt in the thoughts and deeds of men.

This new consciousness of unity was in part the outgrowth of unity of race origin, in part the outgrowth of unity of language, in part the outgrowth of unity of institutional life, in part the outgrowth of unity of military and religious tradition. It seized hold of the minds of men in most practical fashion. The result is that from the time of the death of Charlemagne to the time of the present German Emperor the history of the world is the history of nation-building and of the by-products of nation-building. A nation is scientifically defined as a population of an ethnic unity inhabiting a geographic unity under a common form of government. The exceptions are quite numerous enough to prove the rule.

As the centuries have followed one another it is not difficult to see how the several nations have endeavored to possess themselves of territory that is a geographic unit. They have sought natural boundaries, whether of high mountains, or of broad rivers, or of the sea itself. One war after another is to be explained in terms of a nation's definite purpose to possess itself of a geographic unity as its home. There has been by no means equal care taken by the nations to establish and to protect an

ethnic unity. A strong people has usually felt confident that it could hold an alien element in subjection and yet preserve national integrity and unity of spirit. So one after another of the greater nations of the world has, in seeking for geographic unity, insisted on incorporating in its own body politic alien and often discordant elements and holding them in stern subjection. The examples are too familiar to be recited here.

### **Nemesis of Nation Building**

This process of nation-building has gone on until the nation has come to be conceived as an end in itself, as superior to law, to the conventions of morality, and to the precepts of religion. A form of patriotism has been developed all over the world which finds in the nation itself the highest human end. The logical result, and indeed the almost necessary result, of this type of thinking is the war which is now creeping over the world's civilization and destroying it with the sure pitilessness of an Alpine glacier.

This war is the nemesis of nation-building conceived as an end in itself. Unless a nation, like an individual, have some purpose, some ideal, some motive which lies outside of and beyond self-interest and self-aggrandizement, war must continue on the face of this earth until the day when the last and strongest man, superb in his mighty loneliness, shall look out from a rock in the Caribbean upon a world



that has been depopulated in its pursuit of a false ideal, and be left to die alone with none to mourn or to bury him.

In the history of nations the story of our America has a place that is all its own. The American nation came into being in response to a clear and definite purpose. A theory of human life and of human government was conceived and put into execution on a remote and inaccessible part of the earth's surface. The moving cause of the American nation was the aspiration for civil and political liberty and for individual freedom which was already stirring in the minds of western Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This aspiration gained in force as the art of printing multiplied books and as the periodical press came into existence. The high-minded, the courageous, the venturesome were drawn across the wide ocean toward the west, carrying with them for the most part the liberal ideas and the advanced thought that were steadily increasing their hold upon the people of western Europe. Great Britain, Holland, France, were responding in steadily increasing measure to the same ideals that led the Puritan to Massachusetts Bay and the Cavalier to Virginia.

### **America Not Yet a Nation**

On this Atlantic shore distances were great and communication difficult. In addition there were social, economic and religious differences that kept

the struggling colonists apart. The result was that there grew up here not a nation, but the material out of which a nation could be made. There is a sense, a deep and striking sense, in which the same remains absolutely true today. There is not yet a nation, but the rich and fine materials out of which a true nation can be made by the architect with vision to plan and by the builder with skill adequate to execute.

When a common oppression forced the separate colonists together they still sadly lacked that devotion to a unity higher than any of its component parts which would have saved so much loss and so much suffering during the days of revolution and of the first steps toward a National Government. An enormous step forward was taken when the National Government was built. In the adoption of the Constitution of the United States, the cornerstone was laid for one of the most splendid structures in all the history of nations. Then quickly followed sharp political divergence. There were those who would lay stress upon the new national unity; there were still more who thought it important to emphasize the separate elements out of which that unity had been composed. The judicial logic of Marshall and the convincing eloquence of Webster were the chief unifying and nation-building forces in the generation that followed. Meanwhile sharp differences of economic interest were manifesting themselves, and the fatal question of slavery pressed forward both as an economic and as a political issue. The new nation,



which had already made such progress upon the foundations laid by the fathers, fell apart, and only after one of the most terrible and destructive of civil wars were the ruins of the disaster cleared away and the ground prepared for the next step in construction. Here again mistakes were made so numerous and so severe that the unifying and nation-building process was checked and held back for many years.

Then two new sets of separating and disintegrating forces began to make themselves strongly felt. First, the economic differences which must of necessity manifest themselves over so large and so diverse a territory now revealed themselves with new force—in part as a result of the industrial revolution and in part as a result of purely American conditions,—as involving a class conflict between capital and labor. Soon there were signs that citizenship, with its compelling allegiance to the common weal, was to be subordinated in discouraging fashion, not once but often, to the immediate interests and policies of an economic class.

### **Echo of Old World Feuds**

Second, the immigration from other countries, which had been for a long time substantially homogeneous became increasingly and rapidly heterogeneous. New nationalities, new languages, new racial affinities were drawn upon for the recruitment of the population of the United States. The hopes and the ambitions which 100 and 200 years before had

been the peculiar property of the people of Western Europe had now spread far away to the East and to the South. With this heterogeneous immigration there came, in no inconsiderable measure, the echo of the Old World animosities and feuds and hates. These did not manifest themselves in any direct sense as anti-American, but they did manifest themselves with sufficient strength to deprive America of a unity of attitude, of feeling, and of policy in dealing with the international relations which every day grow in importance and in significance.

So it is that at this moment, with a world war raging about us and a Presidential campaign opening in front of us, with years full of fate stretched out for us to walk in, we are not sure of our national unity of thought and feeling and purpose because of the presence of disintegrating elements and forces which weaken our sense of unity at home and which deprive us of the influence abroad which attaches to unity at home. The grave problem before the American people to-day is that of completing the process of nation-building. It is the problem of setting our house in order. It is the problem of integrating America. It is the problem of subordinating every personal ambition, every class interest and policy, every race attachment, to the one dominant idea of an America free, just, powerful, forward-facing, that shall stand out in the history of nations as the name of a people who conceive the mission and their true greatness to lie in service to mankind. We are the



inheritors of a great tradition. What poets and philosophers have dreamed, that we are trying day by day to do. Our stumblings, our blunders, our shortcomings are many; but if we keep our hearts clean and our heads clear he who a thousand years from now writes the history of liberty and justice and happiness among men will be able to tell to those far-off generations a proud story of the rise and influence of the American nation.

We find here everything which is needed for a great nation. The task before us today is to make it. The task before the American people is nothing more nor less than a speedy continuation, and, if it be practicable, the completion of the process of nation-building. It is the problem of the integration of America about those great fundamental principles and purposes which the very name America itself brings to our minds and which this flag stirs to expression on every lip.

### **Feel America in Our Hearts**

We know in our hearts what America means. The problem is to teach it to our fellows; to share with them an understanding and an appreciation of it; to unite with them in an expression of it. We wish to build a nation fit to serve; a nation that does not find its end in its own aggrandizement, however great that be; a nation that cannot find its purpose complete in amassing all the wealth of Golconda, but that can only achieve its aim by carrying a message to man-

kind of what has been found possible on this continent. Saxon and Celt, Teuton and Slav, Latin and Hun, all are here not as aliens but as citizens; not as immigrants but as members of a body politic which is new in conception in human history, as it is new in its own thought of its high purpose. Can America integrate itself at this crisis; can it show that here is a nation which, out of various and varied ethnic elements, can be brought into a genuine unity by devotion to high principle and by moral purpose before the face of all mankind? Can we make an America that shall go down the corridors of time with a proud place on the pages of history?

We must remember that the greatest empires have fallen as well as risen. We must remember that the most powerful dynasties have passed away as well as come into existence. There is no reason to suppose that our America is going to escape the everlasting law of change. We know its history and its origin. We have seen its rise. We know its present state. Who can predict how many hundreds or thousands of years it will take before the forests will be felled and the streams will be dried, and this great fertile continent of ours, like the plains of ancient Iran where civilization began, will become a desert, fit only for the exploring parties of the archaeologist? When that time comes, what do we want to have written on the pages of history of those who lived for hundreds or perhaps thousands of years on this continent? What do we want to have said about the way in



which America met the greatest crisis of the world's so-called modern history in 1916? Do we wish a nation weak, broken to pieces, irresolute, filled with conflicting and discordant voices, or do we wish for a nation unified, strong, sympathetic, and ready to respond to the cause of a common purpose to serve all humanity, even though the rest of humanity be at war with itself?

### Opportunity Knocking

The year 1916 is but one member of an infinite series. Countless aeons have gone before it and countless aeons will come after it. The physical forces of nature will go their way through indefinite time, performing their allotted functions, obeying their peculiar laws and undergoing those manifold changes and transmutations which make up the heavens and the earth. Not so with the reputation and the influence of a nation. Opportunity will not knock forever at any door; it is knocking now at the door of the American people. If they are able to rise to an appreciation of their own part in the world, of their own controlling principles and policies; if they are able to put aside every self-seeking, every distracting, every brutal appeal, then no one can tell what light may illumine the page on which the history of our nation will yet be written.

It is nearly sixty years since Abraham Lincoln in his debates with Senator Douglas made much use of the Scriptural saying that "a house divided against

itself cannot stand ;” and he added, “ I do not expect the house will fall, but I do expect the house will cease to be divided.” So Mr. President, I say to-day to this influential company of Americans, we do expect, every one of us, that our house will cease to be divided. We do expect that our America will come to full consciousness of its purpose; that the serene courage of Washington, the constructive genius of Hamilton, the keen human insight and sympathy of Jefferson, the patient wisdom of Lincoln, will not have been in vain in teaching us what our country is and may become. Shall we catch sight of that something higher than selfishness, higher than material gain, higher than the triumph of brute force, which alone can lead a nation up to those high places that become sacred in history, and from which influence descends in a mighty torrent, to refresh, to vivify and inspire all mankind?

It is as true today as it was in ancient times, that where there is no vision the people perish. We can make an America with a vision. We cannot make it without.





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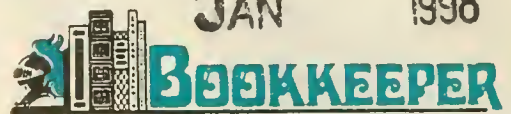




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